DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 302 UD 032 169

AUTHOR	Blumstein, Alfred
TITLE	Youth Violence, Guns, and Illicit Drug Markets. National Institute of Justice Research Preview.
INSTITUTION	Department of Justice, Washington, DC. National Inst. of Justice.
PUB DATE	1996-06-00
NOTE	6p.; Summary of a videotaped presentation that is part of the Criminal Justice Videotape Series of the National Institute of Justice.
AVAILABLE FROM	60-minute videotape available from National Institute of Justice, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000 (Order NCJ 152235, $19; $24 in Canada and other countries); toll-free telephone: 800-852-3420; e-mail: ackncjrs@ncjrs.aspencsys.com
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; *Delinquency; Delinquency Prevention; Drug Use; Homicide; Incentives; Juvenile Justice; Minority Groups; Racial Differences; *Substance Abuse; *Urban Youth; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS	Drug Trafficking; Firearms; *Guns

ABSTRACT

The perception that violence is on the rise is supported by data showing a sharp increase in violent crime among juveniles since the mid-1980s. Although the overall national homicide rate has not increased, homicides by youth under the age of 24 have grown significantly in recent years. The rate of arrest of nonwhite juveniles for drug offenses has also more than doubled, and these increases appear to be linked to the recruitment of juveniles into the illegal drug trade and the consequent diffusion of guns from them to a larger number of young people. This has been particularly evident in urban areas. The links between the diffusion of guns to juveniles and to the general community, a result of the youths' recruitment into the illegal drug trade, is reflected in the 120% jump in the arrest rate for nonwhite juveniles from 1985 to 1992. A concerted effort must be made to get firearms out of the hands of young people. Some communities, including Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) and Charleston (South Carolina), are trying new approaches to the reduction of the number of available firearms. These approaches include a bounty for reports leading to the seizure of an illegal gun. The war on drugs needs to be examined to assess its positive and negative effects on young people, including its unintended consequences. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 416 302

Youth Violence, Guns, and Illicit Drug Markets.
National Institute of Justice.
Research Preview.
June 1996

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

UD03269

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
National Institute of Justice

National Institute of Justice

Research Preview

Jeremy Travis, Director

June 1996

Youth Violence, Guns, and Illicit Drug Markets

A Summary of a Presentation by Alfred Blumstein, Ph.D., Carnegie Mellon University

Note: This Research Preview updates the December 1995 release.

The perception that violence is on the rise is supported by data showing a sharp increase in violent crime among juveniles since the mid-1980s. Although the overall national homicide rate has not increased over the past 20 years, homicides by youths under the age of 24 have grown significantly in recent years. Between 1985 and 1992, the rate of homicide by young people, the number they committed with guns, and the arrest rate of nonwhite juveniles for drug offenses have all more than doubled. These increases appear to be linked to the recruitment of juveniles into the illegal drug trade and the consequent diffusion of guns from them to a much larger number of young people.

Age, murder, and illegal drug use

Age and murder. It has long been known that crime rates typically peak in the late teen years, and age-specific patterns for such crimes as robbery and burglary have not changed significantly in the past 20 years. However, major changes have occurred in homicide patterns among the young.

From 1970 to 1985, individuals ages 18 to 24 were the most likely of any age group to commit murder, and the murder rate among this group was relatively steady. In 1985, murder by people under 24 began to increase: for those 18 and younger, the homicide rate more than doubled between 1985 and 1992. During that same period, the rate among those 24 to 30 remained steady, and the rate declined for those over 30. Thus, much of the rise in the Nation's overall homicide rate in the late 1980s was due to the surge in killings by the young.

To further illustrate the dimensions of this change, a calculation can be made to show the "excess" murders attributable to young people, i.e., the homicides that would not have been committed if the rates for ages 15–22 had remained stable at their 1970–1985 levels. A total of 18,600 of these "excess murders" are estimated to have been committed between 1986 and 1992. This represents about 12 percent of the annual average of 22,000 murders during those 7 years.

Age, race, and illegal drugs. The surge in violent juvenile crime coincided with an increase in drug arrests, which rose particularly among nonwhites in urban areas. After a 10-year period of stability in drug arrests of nonwhite juveniles, the rise of urban crack cocaine markets led to sharply increased rates among this group, beginning in 1985. To meet the growth in demand for crack cocaine, the drug industry had recruited young sellers, primarily nonwhite youths, many of whom saw this as their only viable economic opportunity. The rate of arrests rose from approximately 200 per 100,000 in 1985 to twice that rate 4 years later.

For white youths, drug arrests declined during this period, in part because of a general policy shift begun in 1975 that reversed their rapidly growing drug arrest rate, primarily for marijuana. The rapid increase in arrests of nonwhites (primarily African Americans) reflected the extent to which crack street markets were more accessible to police (as well as to buyers) than the more surreptitious markets maintained by white drug dealers.

Murder with guns. Guns are increasingly involved in homicides among youths. From 1976 to 1985, when the homicide rate involving juveniles was fairly steady, a gun was used more often than any other weapon (a constant 60 percent of the time). Seven years later, by 1992, the number of murders by juveniles in which a gun was involved had doubled, but the number committed without a gun remained steady.

The linkage: a hypothesis. As more juveniles were recruited to sell crack, they armed themselves with guns. For those transporting valuable illicit merchandise, whether money or drugs, a gun was seen as necessary for protection, especially because they could not call for police assistance if threatened. Since juveniles are tightly networked in schools and in their neighborhoods, some youths not involved in the drug business felt they had to carry guns to protect themselves from armed juvenile drug sellers. Possibly, many also saw guns as conferring a measure of status and power. Gun possession escalated into an arms race that diffused the weapons broadly throughout the community.

Considering the known frequency with which male teenagers often resort to violence to settle arguments, the increased presence of guns has meant that disputes once settled by fist fights often escalated to shooting incidents resulting in greater lethality. Juveniles' use of firearms is more random than adults'; teenage behavior is often marked by recklessness and bravado, while adults generally act with more restraint. Until recently, the majority of homicide cases involved people who knew each other. Overall, between 1976 and 1991, the proportion of homicides involving strangers was about 20 percent. But when male juveniles were involved as perpetrators, the figure climbed to 34 percent.

The links between the diffusion of guns to juveniles and to the general community—a result of youths' recruitment into the illegal drug trade—is reflected in the 120 percent jump in the homicide arrest rate for nonwhite juveniles from 1985 to 1992. For white juveniles, the rate rose about 80 percent, even though there was no strong indication of their involvement in the drug trade; also, this increase began in 1988, 3 years after the rise among nonwhites began—a lag consistent with the diffusion hypothesis. In sharp contrast, there was no growth in the homicide rate for adults of either group.

Implications

Demographics and crime. Meanwhile, the incarceration rate in this country has grown dramatically. In the 50 years from 1923 to 1973, it was quite stable and averaged about 110 per 100,000. Since then, the rate has almost quadrupled to over 400 per 100,000 in State and Federal prisons. In fact, the large increase in incarcerated adults could have contributed substantially to the recruitment of juveniles into the drug trade.

Of particular relevance to future crime rates is the growing number of teenagers. The age group currently responsible for the highest homicide rate, the 18-year-olds, is about as small as it has been in recent years. As this cohort ages, its crime rate may level out, as it has in the past. But it is also possible that today's 18-year-olds will continue reckless behavior as they grow older. However, children who are now younger (about ages 5 to 15) represent the future problem, because they are larger cohorts than the current 18-year-old group. Even if current rates do not continue to rise, violent crime is likely to increase because there will be more 18-year-olds to commit violence at a higher rate.

Options to change the trends. A concerted effort needs to be made to get firearms out of the hands of young people. In most cases it is not a legislative issue—the carrying of firearms by juveniles is illegal almost everywhere, and the 1994 Crime Law made it a Federal offense. Because so many of the guns obtained illegally have moved across State lines, initially from a licensed firearms dealer, the Federal government has an important role in enforcing the laws prohibiting those illegal sales. Stronger enforcement and other avenues of depleting the gun supply need to be found, especially in urban areas.

Some communities are trying new ways to cut down the number of guns. Pittsburgh's "gun task force" is examining

This summary is based on a presentation by Alfred Blumstein, Ph.D., J. Erik Jonsson University Professor of Urban Systems and Operations Research at the H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management, Carnegie Mellon University. As part of NIJ's Research in Progress Seminar Series, Dr. Blumstein discussed his work with an audience of researchers and criminal justice professionals and practitioners. A 60-minute VHS videotape, *Youth Violence, Guns, and Illicit Drug Markets*, is available for $19 ($24 in Canada and other foreign countries). Ask for NCJ 152235. Use the order form on the NEXT PAGE to obtain this videotape and any of the other tapes now available in the series.

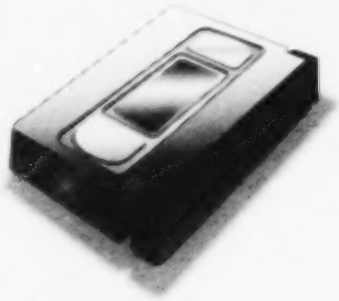
Dr. Blumstein's research is being extended with an NIJ grant on juvenile violence and its relationship to drug markets.

Points of view in this document do not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice.

a variety of approaches, including radio and television spots with a telephone number to use to anonymously report illegal guns. In Charleston, South Carolina, a bounty is offered for reports leading to the seizure of an illegal gun. Such an approach not only removes that gun from circulation, it also inhibits the brandishing of guns, which stimulates others to obtain a gun. These are the kind of approaches needed to reverse the escalating arms race in our neighborhoods.

In the long term, a major effort has to be made to build a base of understanding by involving the research community in examining juvenile crime and its causes, the links between those two criminogenic commodities—guns and drugs—in the community and in their respective markets, and the rate of homicides among young people. Financial resources are needed to pursue these issues at the necessary depth. The war on drugs, in particular, needs to be examined to assess its positive and negative effects, including its unintended consequences.

The Latest Criminal Justice Videotape Series from NIJ:



Research in Progress Seminars

Learn about the latest developments in criminal justice research from prominent criminal justice experts.

Each 60-minute tape presents a well-known scholar discussing his or her current studies and how they relate to existing criminal justice research and includes the lecturer's responses to audience questions. In addition to *Youth Violence, Guns, and Illicit Drug Markets*, reported on in this Research Preview, the other tapes available in VHS format are listed on page 4.

To order any of these tapes, please complete and return this form with your payment ($19, U.S.; $24, Canada and other countries) to National Criminal Justice Reference Service, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849–6000. Call 800–851–3420, or e-mail askncjrs@ncjrs.aspensys.com if you have any questions.

Please send me the following tapes:

Qty.	Presenter Name and NCJ Number	Subtotal
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	Total _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____ Daytime phone ( ) _____

___ Payment enclosed (U.S. dollars) ___ Deduct this item from my NCJRS Deposit Account, account no. _____

Charge my: ___ MasterCard ___VISA Account no. _____

Exp. date _____ Signature _____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Research in Progress VHS Tapes Now Available

NCJ 152256—Peter W. Greenwood, Ph.D., Director, Criminal Justice Research Program, The RAND Corporation: *Three Strikes, You're Out: Benefits and Costs of California's New Mandatory-Sentencing Law.*

NCJ 152257—Christian Pfeiffer, Ph.D., Director of the Kriminologisches Forschungsinstitut Niedersachsen: *Sentencing Policy and Crime Rates in Reunified Germany.*

NCJ 152258—Arthur L. Kellerman, M.D., M.P.H., Director of the Center for Injury Control, School of Public Health and Associate Professor in the Division of Emergency Medicine, School of Medicine, Emory University: *Understanding and Preventing Violence: A Public Health Perspective.*

NCJ 152692—James Inciardi, Ph.D., Director, Drug and Alcohol Center, University of Delaware: *A Corrections-Based Continuum of Effective Drug Abuse Treatment.*

NCJ 153270—Adele Harrell, Ph.D., Director, Program on Law and Behavior, The Urban Institute: *Intervening with High-Risk Youth: Preliminary Findings from the Children-at-Risk Program.*

NCJ 153271—Marvin Wolfgang, Ph.D., Director, Legal Studies and Criminology, University of Pennsylvania: *Crime in a Birth Cohort: A Replication in the People's Republic of China.*

NCJ 153730—Lawrence W. Sherman, Ph.D., Chief Criminologist, Indianapolis Police Department, Professor of Criminology, University of Maryland: *Reducing Gun Violence: Community Policing Against Gun Crime.*

NCJ 153272—Cathy Spatz Widom, Ph.D., Professor, School of Criminal Justice, State University of New York—Albany: *The Cycle of Violence Revisited Six Years Later.*

NCJ 153275—Wesley Skogan, Ph.D., Professor, Political Science and Urban Affairs, Northwestern University: *Community Policing in Chicago: Fact or Fiction?*

NCJ 153850—Scott H. Decker, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, University of Missouri–St. Louis, and Susan Pennell, Director, Criminal Justice Research Unit, San Diego Association of Governments: *Monitoring the Illegal Firearms Market.*

NCJ 154277—Terrie Moffitt, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin: *Partner Violence Among Young Adults.*

NCJ 156925—Orlando Rodriguez, Ph.D., Director, Hispanic Research Center, Fordham University: *The New Immigrant Hispanic Populations: Implications for Crime and Delinquency in the Next Decade.*

NCJ 156925—John Monahan, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and Legal Medicine, University of Virginia: *Mental Illness and Violent Crime.*

NCJ 157643—Benjamin Saunders, Ph.D., and Dean G. Kilpatrick, Ph.D., Medical University of South Carolina: *Prevalence and Consequences of Child Victimization: Preliminary Results from the National Survey of Adolescents.*

NCJ 159739—Joel H. Garner, Ph.D., Research Director, Joint Centers for Justice Studies: *Use of Force By and Against the Police.*

NCJ 159740—Kim English, Ph.D., Research Director, Colorado Division of Criminal Justice: *Managing Adult Sex Offenders in Community Settings: A Containment Approach.*

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
National Institute of Justice

Washington, D.C. 20531

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use $300

BULK RATE
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
DOJ/NIJ
Permit No. G-91